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EAID
SUBJECT: Still Fighting Back: Cite Soleil Three Weeks Post-Earthquake

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Cite Soleil, once Haiti's most emblematic hot spot, was hit hard but not devastated by the January 12 earthquake. Life there has changed, people are adjusting, and this latest catastrophe seems to have been largely absorbed and shaken off with an incredible resiliency. The pre-earthquake concerns and weaknesses in the community - security, governance, delivery of services, employment - have been exacerbated. GOH and the international community need to move quickly to regain lost momentum, confront the growing gang problem, show they are capable of meeting basic needs and mend the weakened fabric of civil society. These emergent concerns and the next steps implemented to address them will be key to long-term stability. End Summary.

BEATEN BUT NOT BOWED

¶2. (U) Many schools and churches, key structures and institutions in Cite Soleil, were destroyed or heavily damaged in the January 12 earthquake that devastated more built up areas of Port-au-Prince. Overall damage to Cite Soleil's more modest structures was, understandably, not as extensive. When a shanty falls over, it is easily propped up again. Many people, as in the rest of the city, continue to sleep in the streets out of fear of aftershocks but activity and the pace of life has largely returned to this sprawling shantytown.

¶3. (U) Contacts report that by the second and third days after the earthquake, the "ti marchants," small street-side vendors, were back out selling their mangos, vegetables and a myriad of other products. This activity had slowed by about the fifth day post-earthquake as supplies dwindled and the normal supply pipelines dried up. The pipelines for manufactured or processed goods have reopened as products flow overland from the Dominican Republic.

EXODUS

¶4. (U) Adding to the disruption of goods, the normal flow of food products from the countryside to the city also dwindled and was replaced by a flow of people returning to hometowns and regions to escape the deteriorating situation in the city. Preliminary information suggests that maybe 20 percent of Cite Soleil's

population has left the area, most for their areas of origin. The Port-au-Prince-based Inter-University Institute for Research and Development (INURED) is conducting a rapid assessment of Cite Soleil in the wake of the earthquake (the assessment's findings were not available for inclusion in this message). Assessment personnel relayed that virtually every one of the 1,000 households surveyed reported two or three household members had departed Cite Soleil and the Port-au-Prince area. Part of the exodus is children sent to live with family members in other areas. Another segment is made up of some of the family bread winners leaving for other unaffected areas in search of work.

RELIEF EFFORTS

15. (U) This significant out-migration has helped relieve some of the stress on the limited resources available. Food and water distribution is taking place in Cite Soleil, and there are some small and medium sized IDP camps in and around Cite Soleil but no large settlements. Most residents have remained at their homes but still sleep in the streets. The heavy influx of relief commodities should help to bring down prices in the area and INURED estimates life will be relatively "normal" within several weeks.

SECURITY

16. (SBU) Approximately 4,000 prisoners escaped from Port-au-Prince's main prison on January 12. Many were not hardened criminals and were being held in lengthy pre-trial detention, never having been sentenced. There were, however, numerous gang members/leaders who had been captured in the last three years and many have filtered back into their former territories in Cite Soleil, Bel Air and the Martissant area. Contacts in Cite Soleil report increased conflict and casualties as these returning criminals clash with those who aspired to leadership in their absence. Similar reports are coming in from other areas as inter and intra-gang rivalries and scores are settled. This is occurring while Haitian police (PNH) and MINUSTAH try to recover and reorganize from the devastating affect of the earthquake and MINUSTAH troops have been focused on relief effort. The USG, Canada and MINUSTAH are bringing additional resources on line to bolster PNH and UNPOL capabilities.

17. (SBU) In many instances, these returning or resurgent criminal elements are finding a populace more determined than ever before to resist them. There have been several occasions in Cite Soleil where the population has either cooperated with PNH or taken justice into their own hands to deal with these criminals. Unfortunately, the release of so many criminals simultaneously is overwhelming the community, and gang intimidation may create a reticence among the population, to go to the PNH.

WHAT NEXT?

18. (SBU) On February 9, about 45 members of Cite Soleil's Community Forum, an umbrella civic organization comprised of representatives from Cite Soleil's eight geographic "blocs", community groups, religious organizations and, ostensibly, the local elected officials, met with a representative of the GOH's Shelter Committee and a MINUSTAH official to voice their concerns. The two primary issues raised were the need for shelters and security. Residents are requesting assistance with materials to either rebuild or repair their homes, or to be given access to shelter in the run-up to the rainy season. Of equal concern to them is the deteriorating security situation. At this point it may be more expectation than reality but, with the rumors and reality of escaped gangs members circulating, the word on the street that

everyone fears is "payback." Many of these gang members were put behind bars with the assistance of these very community leaders, who stepped forward over the past two years to cooperate with the PNH to get these individuals off the streets. Now they are afraid of retaliation. PNH and MINUSTAH, with international support, need to move soon to reestablish a robust presence in these neighborhoods.

19. (SBU) People who know Cite Soleil - and it is probably true of any of the numerous bidonville in and around the greater Port-au-Prince area - say that there is a natural segregation that matches the country's geographic regions. People from the north tend to settle in one area, people from the south another and those from the central plateau a third. These areas are further broken down into neighborhoods comprised of people coming from particular townships, or even towns. And it is to these towns that as many as 20 percent of the population has returned in the wake of the earthquake. Keeping those people there - and maybe drawing still more with the promise of long-term shelter and jobs - will be key to the long-term stability and health of areas like Cite Soleil.

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